

NAME

Alberta Virtual Pain Program (AVPP)

Group Program Participant Guide



Primary Care
Alberta

Virtual Pain
Program



Healthlink.AlbertaVirtualPainProgram@PrimaryCareAlberta.ca

My At-Home Practices: Participant Guide

Note: These My At-Home Practices will be introduced throughout the 6-week group-based program. You are welcome to read through in advance or print off a copy if it will be helpful to your learning. To get the most out of the exercises, we encourage you to hold off on completing any of these practices until after each session.



My At-Home Practice

My Pain Journey

Activity: Fill your Flower

How do I practice this activity:

You can either print this page or write down your answers on a separate piece of paper

On the **petals**, write four things or people that make you smile or feel joy (example: it could be a recent movie/tv show, song, movement, something you read).

On the **roots**, write two people who you feel supported by.

On the **leaves**, write two small things you most hope to change in your pain journey



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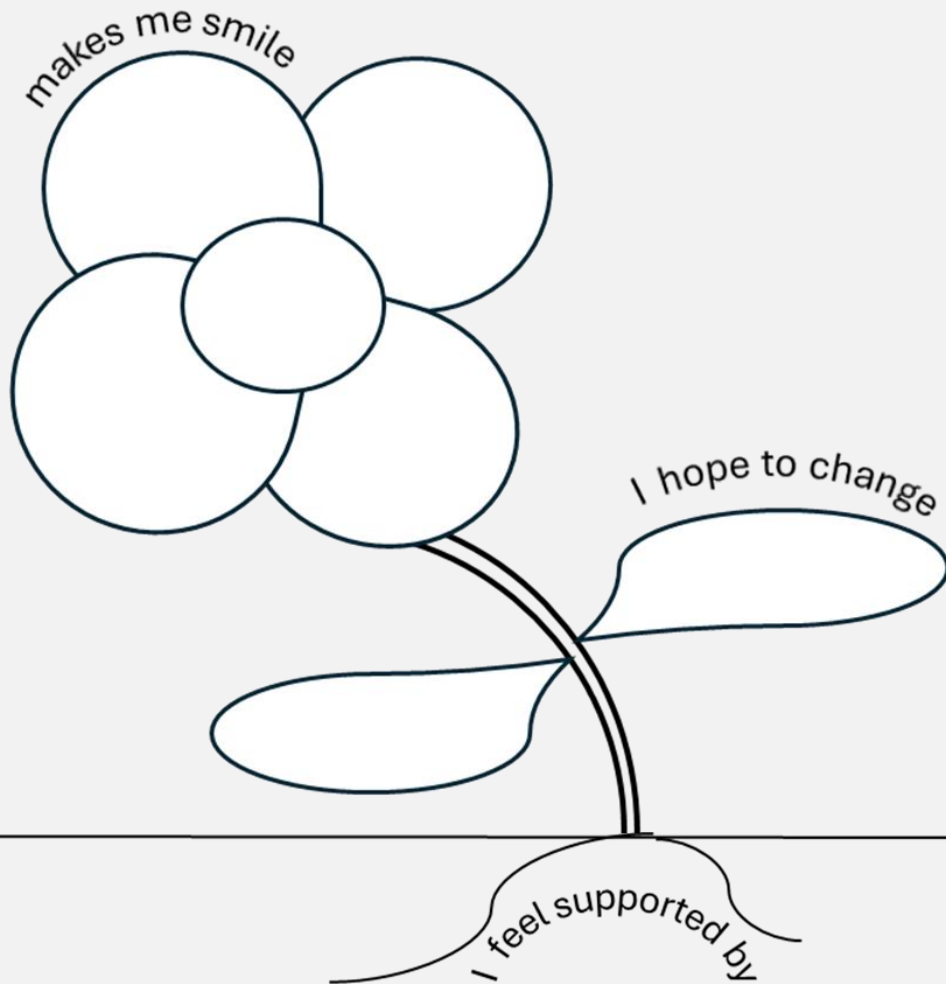
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My At-Home Practice

My Pain Journey

Activity: Fill your Flower



My At-Home Practice

What Matters to Me?

Activity: Values and Actions

What is it?

This is an activity that focuses on identifying our current values and what actions we can take to live by our values.

How do I practice this activity?

- Take a look at the example chart of different values and possible actions (page 2)
- Fill out as little or as much as you want of your own values and actions (page 3)

Tip: If you feel stuck thinking of values or actions, change your environment where you do the activity. Choose a quiet place or somewhere you feel the most connected to nature.



My At-Home Practice

What Matters to Me?

Examples Chart

Life Areas	Values Examples	Action Examples
Relationships (family, friends, parenting, social life)	Be part of a group/community. Have close and healthy relationships with others.	Get together with a group of people with shared interests. Write my pain level on the kitchen whiteboard so my loved ones know what I can can/can't do for them that day.
Work/Education/Volunteering	Contribute to my community.	Volunteer at an animal shelter.
Recreation/Leisure	Experience exciting, new, and fun things. Seek adventures. Feel healthy.	Try a new recipe. Learn to play piano or sing. Engage in gentle water and/or sitting exercises
Personal Growth/Spirituality	Be accepting of myself.	Practice self-compassion and mindfulness activities.



My At-Home Practice

What Matters to Me?

How would you fill out this chart based on what is important to you?

Life Areas	Values	Actions
Relationships (family, friends, parenting, social life)		
Work/Education/Volunteering		
Recreation/Leisure		
Personal Growth/Spirituality		



My At-Home Practice

What Matters to Me?



Activity: Photograph Joy

What is it?

This is an activity that involves taking a photo of something or someone that brings you joy.

How do I practice this activity?

Use your camera/phone to take a photo of an object, scenery, plant, artwork, person, or animal that creates the feeling of joy for you.

Questions to ask yourself

What was it about the photo that brought you joy? Are there values that bring you that same sense of joy?



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My At-Home Practice

Why Do I Hurt?

Activity: What makes my pain better or worse?

What is it?

This is a self-reflection activity that encourages us to think about which factors might worsen or improve our pain experience.

Factors that make my pain worse	Factors that improve my pain
Example: Lack of sleep	Example: Ice/heat



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My At-Home Practice

Moving My Way

Activity: Moving With Joy

What is it?

This is a movement activity that you find enjoyable.

When we perform movements that feel safe and comfortable to us, we can help to retrain our overprotective pain system.

How do I practice this activity?

Starting with just a few minutes, move your body in a way that feels good to you. You decide how you move. All movements, even little ones to start, are helpful.

There are so many ways to move. You could move:

- ✓ Pain-free areas or less painful spots
- ✓ To music or to the rhythm of your breath
- ✓ By walking indoors or outside
- ✓ By dancing, hula hooping, clapping, tapping, any speed you like
- ✓ Alone or with others
- ✓ Using a YouTube video.
- ✓ To your own routine

At times, when moving feels challenging you can close your eyes and visualize that you are moving with joy.

This is your groove!



My At-Home Practice

Nurturing Our Nervous System

Grounding Activities: Choose One To Try Out This Week

Put your hands under water – focus on the physical sensation of the water on your hands, fingertips, and palms. You can choose colder or warmer water if you wish.

Hold an ice cube in your hands – what does it feel like for the ice to melt in the palm of your hand?

Listen to instrumental music – choose an instrumental song and see if you can focus on identifying the different instruments (if your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the sounds). You can substitute this music with sounds of birds/nature.

Reflections: Did you notice any changes in your pain experience?
Did the volume of your pain turn up, down, or did it stay the same?



My At-Home Practice

Nurturing Our Nervous System

Catch-It	Check-It	Change-It
<p>Notice if you have a <i>thought</i> related to your pain. What was the <i>thought</i>?</p>	<p>Was the thought helpful or unhelpful? What <i>emotions</i> came up for you?</p>	<p>What might be a more realistic/helpful/hopeful thought? (if you want to change the thought)</p>
<p>Example:</p> <p>Wow, I woke up and felt I could get out of bed with ease</p>	<p>Helpful thought.</p> <p><i>Emotions:</i> content, optimistic, curious</p>	<p>If I don't want to change the thought, that's ok! Maybe I want to keep the thought as it is.</p>
<p>Example:</p> <p>When I wake up in pain, it always ruins my day.</p>	<p>Unhelpful thought.</p> <p><i>Emotions:</i> frustrated, anxious, defeated</p>	<p>I have had days with pain but have also enjoyed spending time with good friends.</p>

My At-Home Practice

Medications: One Piece of Our Pie

Activity: How do medications help me do activities that matter to me?

What is it?

This is a self-reflection activity that encourages us to think about the role medications can play in our overall wellness.

Why do this? Our overall wellness can be thought of as a pie. The slices of our pie are the strategies we use to improve our overall wellness. These strategies could be sleep, movement, and social connection to name a few.

Medications are also one strategy for us to try to improve our overall wellness. Medications can even create space for us to perform other strategies that can improve our overall wellness.

How would you label your slices of the overall wellness pie diagram?
Add your strategies to the pie.

Examples of some strategies you already use or want to use:

- Movement
- Sleep
- Nutrition
- Connection with others
- Relaxation & coping activities
- Medications
- What are some others?*

Some strategies may have a larger or smaller role in your overall wellness. The slices aren't always the same size.



My At-Home Practice

Medications: One Piece of Our Pie

List how your current medications (including prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, injections, supplements, and other substances) can be helpful and unhelpful to you.

In the last month, how have my current medications been...

Helpful for me	Unhelpful for me

Tip: We encourage you to share this activity with your healthcare team.



My At-Home Practice

Pain Speak: Empowering our Voice

Activity: An Engaged Patient is a Prepared Patient

What is it?

This is a communication worksheet that you can complete before going to an appointment.

Communication is a two-way street. By preparing for your appointment, you can express your concerns, needs, and goals more effectively.

How do I practice this activity?

Answering some of the questions on the next page can help you have a focused discussion with your health care provider.

Option: Watch the 10-minute video [7 Tips for Discussing Chronic Pain with Your Doctor](#)
Created by the [US Pain Foundation](#)



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My At-Home Practice

Pain Speak: Empowering our Voice

What questions or concerns do I want addressed during this appointment? _____

Do I have any new symptoms? If yes, my symptoms are: _____

- how long have I had them: _____

- since they started, they are getting worse, staying the same, getting better: _____

- activities that make it worse: _____

- they are eased by: _____

- I get these symptoms _____ times per day, _____ days per week, _____ days per month, _____ weeks per month, other _____

- each time my symptoms last for _____ minutes, _____ hours, _____ days, other _____

- how is my sleep affected? _____

- how has my usual routine changed recently? Examples: sleeping, eating, standing, walking, showering, increased stress, life events/family, work? _____

- if I had similar symptoms in the past, when was it? What helped? How long did it last? _____

What am I most hoping to get from this appointment? _____



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My At-Home Practice

Pain Speak: Empowering our Voice

Activity: Getting the most out of every appointment

What is it?

These are some example questions you can ask to help you get the most out of your medical appointments.

Communication is a two-way street. Don't be afraid to ask your health provider to repeat or clarify important information.

How do I practice this activity?

Read some of the questions out loud in front of the mirror or with a friend. By becoming familiar with asking questions during your health appointment you can ensure you are getting the information you need to manage your health.



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My At-Home Practice

Pain Speak: Empowering our Voice

I need a minute to think about what
you've just said.

Can you say that again, I didn't quite catch it?

How will I tell if the medication is working?

How long does it take to know if the treatment is working?

What is the best way for me to contact you if I have questions or concerns?

Can you write the diagnosis down for me?

Are there any websites you can recommend so I can learn more?

Pro Tip: At your appointment **repeat** back what you understood before you leave.



My At-Home Practice

Mission Nutrition

Activity: Flare Day Meal Plan

Why do this?

Every day, week, or month can be a different experience. During those times when your symptoms are more intense having access to some quick meals can help ensure you are eating nutritious foods.

How do I practice this activity?

1. List one meal you can pull together easily for days when you have a flare up.

Example:

1. Peanut butter on whole grain bread with sliced banana and yogurt on the side.
2. Yogurt Parfait: Plain yogurt oatmeal or bran cereal with nuts/seeds, topped with thawed frozen fruit.

Tip: Post your Flare Day Meal Plan on the fridge or inside your cupboard.

Option: Watch the [Nutrition Video](#) created by [Pain Canada](#)
Resource: Free online self-management tool for people living with chronic pain [LivePlanBe+](#)



My At-Home Practice

Slipping Into Better Sleep

Activity: Planning for better sleep

What is it?

Pain can affect our sleep and how we sleep can affect our pain. Exploring different strategies that help to improve one, can also help to improve the other.

Activity: Create a list of strategies to ease your pain at night

Examples: mindful moment, timing of medications, etc.

Activity: Create a list of things you can do if you can't fall asleep

Examples: relaxation strategy, meditation activity, listening to an audiobook, reassure yourself that at least you are resting, get out of bed and do a quiet activity until drowsy



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My At-Home Practice

Slipping Into Better Sleep

Sleep Tips

- ✓ Cool temperature of room
- ✓ Keep room dark
- ✓ Use a pillow between legs or a rolled towel under neck
- ✓ Engage in relaxation activities
- ✓ Use ear plugs, noise cancelling devices, sleep masks
- ✓ Listen to music or audiobooks
- ✓ Communicate sleep needs with loved ones
- ✓ Try not to get stuck on not being able to sleep
- ✓ It's ok to be resting when you are not asleep
- ✓ If you did not sleep well, consider rearranging your schedule for the next day (try not to cancel plans)
- ✓ Even 'good sleepers' don't get 8 hours of good quality sleep.



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My At-Home Practice Next Steps

1
What is one small change you would like to try to make?

3
What could get in the way of making this change?

4
Is there a strategy (or two) that might help you?

2
What could be the best possible result that could come from this change?

5
How will you know you are making progress? Be specific.

6
How will you celebrate every time you try a small step forward?

My Journey



My At-Home Practice Resource Page

Write down any mindfulness practices/other strategies, celebration choices, supports, and resources that you found helpful or may find helpful as part of your pain journey.

Mindfulness/Other Strategies:

e.g. Breathing practice, movement, mindful eating, relaxation activity ...

Mindfulness/Other Strategies:

Mindfulness/Other Strategies:

Celebration Choices:

e.g. Sharing in peer support group/friends/family, favorite cup of tea ...

Supports:

e.g. Peer support group, therapist, family, faith group, pet ...

Resources:

e.g. AHS Chronic Pain Primary Health Care Resource Centre website; Power Over Pain portal ...



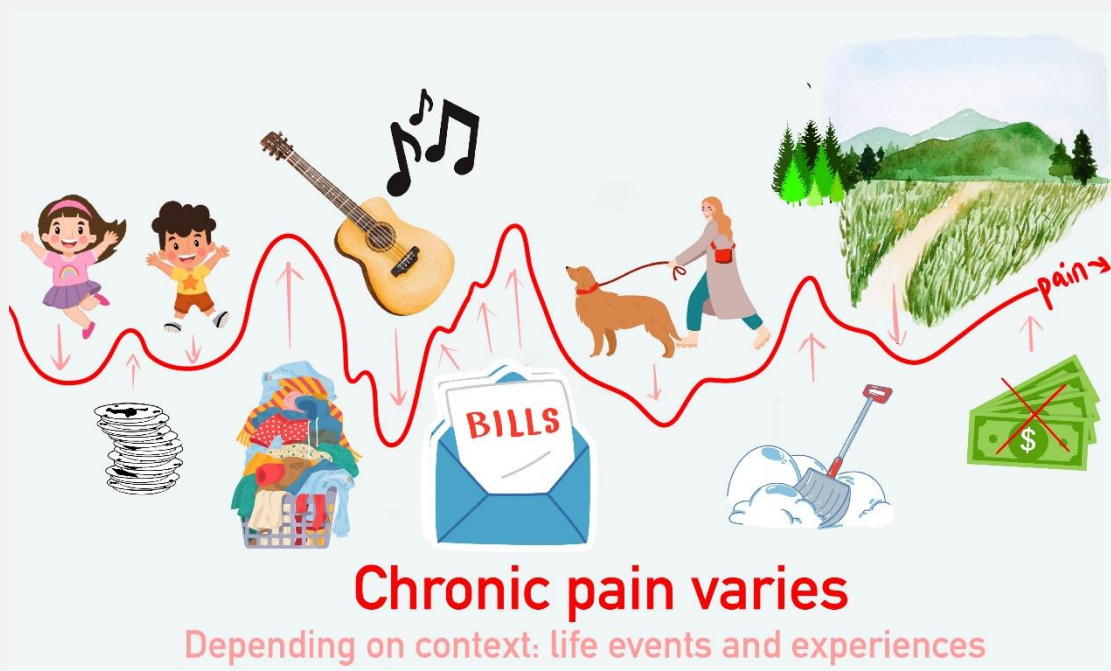


My At-Home Practice Flare-Up Action Plan

Activity: My Flare-Up Action Plan

Why do this?

Sometimes pain flare-ups happen. Creating your own Flare-Up Action Plan can help you be ready for higher pain days. Taking time to prepare a flare-up plan when your pain levels are lower allows you to quickly implement strategies that work for you on those challenging days. Think of it like a First Aid Kit – it's there when you need it.



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My At-Home Practice Flare-Up Action Plan

Over time, your aims and plans can and will change.

Even the best laid out plans may not turn out as we hoped. Think of them as evolving based on what strategies you have tried. After using a strategy for a reasonable length of time, you will learn what works for you and what doesn't. Start small & add to your plan to make it the most effective for you.

Remember your flare-up will pass and being accepting will help. Keep this plan in a place where it will be easy to see and use.

What could be EARLY warning signs of a pain flare-up?

Physical Sensations	Examples: muscle tension, achiness, headache, nausea, fatigue, dizziness ...
Thoughts	Examples: "why does this always happen to me!" "I will never get better"...
Emotions	Examples: sad, irritable, depressed, anxious ...
Actions & Behaviours	Examples: isolation, substance use, doing less activity or movement, withdrawing, arguing with loved ones ...
Triggers	Examples: over-doing it, caffeine, changes in weather, increased stress or worry, poor sleep ...

.....



My At-Home Practice

My Flare-Up Action Plan

Session 1

My Pain Journey

Strategies I can use

Acceptance can help with healing.

- ☐ Mindful breathing
- ☐ Access supports
- ☐ List my strengths
- ☐ Do activities I enjoy
- ☐ Remind: “accepting does not mean I approve”
- ☐ Notice new ways I have grown
- ☐ Recall “this flare will pass, being kind to myself can help”
- ☐ Attend Peer Support Sessions
- ☐ Others:



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My At-Home Practice Flare-Up Action Plan

Session 2

What Matters to Me? **Identifying values can help us make decisions about how we want to live our life.**

Strategies I can use

- ☐ Identify what is most important to me (my values)
- ☐ Mindful “54321” using my senses
- ☐ Do something gentle that matches my values
- ☐ Look at photos of things or people that bring me joy

☐ Others:

Why Do I Hurt?	Pain is real. Hurt does not always equal harm.
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Strategies I can use

- ☐ Reassure myself that my pain alarm can be overprotective
- ☐ Focus my attention to things that are not associated with pain
- ☐ These activities turn my pain volume down:
- ☐ Others:



My At-Home Practice Flare-Up Action Plan

Session 3

Moving My Way

Strategies I can use

Sore, but safe.

A little step forward is still a step forward.

- ☐ Reassure myself “I am sore, but safe”
- ☐ Move parts that hurt less
- ☐ Move or stretch to music
- ☐ Others:
- ☐ Pace by taking breaks
- ☐ Acknowledge “I am moving as I am able”

Nurturing Our Nervous System

Strategies I can use

Improving self-awareness of our emotions, thoughts, and actions can help us decrease stress and turn down the volume of our pain.

- ☐ Practice Catch it, Check it, Change it
 - ☐ Choose a calming relaxation activity
 - ☐ Grounding activities that I can use are:
 - ☐ Others:



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My At-Home Practice Flare-Up Action Plan

Session 4

Meds Are One Piece of the Pie	Medications can provide a window of opportunity for change.
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Strategies I can use

☐ Refer to my “Overall Wellness Pie” for strategies

☐ What is helpful or unhelpful for me :

☐ Other ways to ease my pain are:

Strategies I can use

☐ Refer to my “Overall Wellness Pie” for strategies

☐ What is helpful or unhelpful for me :

☐ Other ways to ease my pain are:

Strategies I can use

☐ Refer to my “Overall Wellness Pie” for strategies

☐ What is helpful or unhelpful for me :

☐ Other ways to ease my pain are:

Strategies I can use

☐ Refer to my “Overall Wellness Pie” for strategies

☐ What is helpful or unhelpful for me :

☐ Other ways to ease my pain are:

Pain Speak: Preparing for your appointments can help you better communicate your concerns, needs, and goals with your health care provider,

Strategies I can use

- ☐ List my needs
- ☐ Use the symptom template
- ☐ Try hand tracing breathing
- ☐ Practice the scripts
- ☐ Plan self-care
- ☐ Bring a loved one with me for support
- ☐ Ask when I don't understand
- ☐ Others:

Strategies I can use

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- ☐ Others:

Strategies I can use

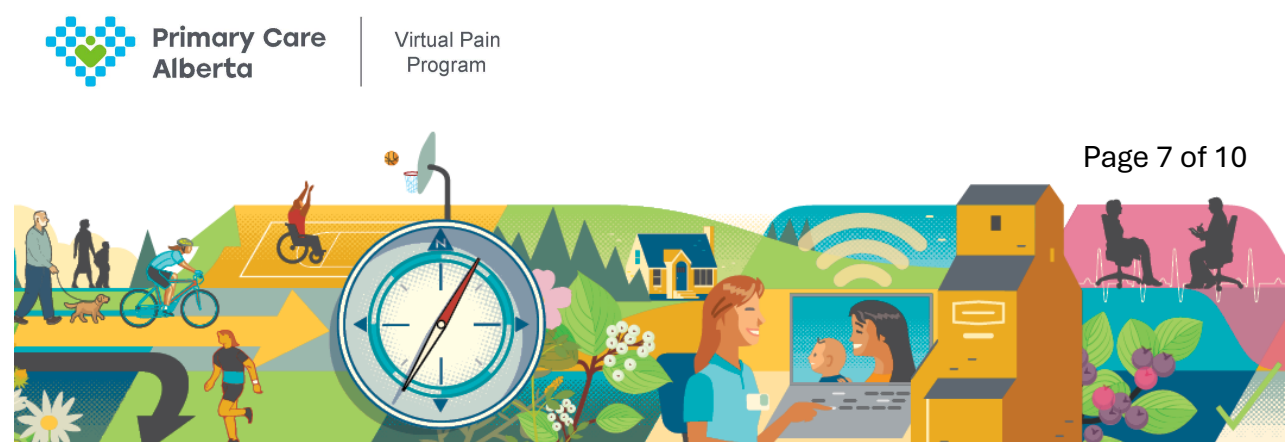
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- ☐ Bring a loved one with me for support
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- ☐ Others:

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- ☐ Bring a loved one with me for support
- ☐ Ask when I don't understand
- ☐ Others:



A colorful banner for the Primary Care Alberta Virtual Pain Program. It features a large clock in the center, a person on a bicycle, a person in a wheelchair, a person walking a dog, a person running, a person sitting at a desk with a laptop, and a person sitting at a desk with a computer monitor. The background includes a house, trees, and a Wi-Fi symbol. The text 'Primary Care Alberta' is on the left, and 'Virtual Pain Program' is on the right. The page number 'Page 7 of 10' is in the bottom right corner.

A colorful banner for the Primary Care Alberta Virtual Pain Program. It features a large clock in the center, a person on a bicycle, a person in a wheelchair, a person walking a dog, a person running, a person sitting at a desk with a laptop, and a person sitting at a desk with a computer monitor. The background includes a house, trees, and a Wi-Fi symbol. The text 'Primary Care Alberta' is on the left, and 'Virtual Pain Program' is on the right. The page number 'Page 7 of 10' is in the bottom right corner.

My At-Home Practice Flare-Up Action Plan

Session 5

Slipping Into Better Sleep **We are preparing for sleep the moment we wake up.**

Slipping Into Better Sleep **We are preparing for sleep the moment we wake up.**

Strategies I can use

- ☐ Exposure to morning sunlight
- ☐ Move throughout the day
- ☐ Pace my activity in the day
- ☐ Limit napping
- ☐ Dim lights and turn off electronics
- ☐ Follow my sleep routine
- ☐ Reassure myself “it’s okay if I don’t fall asleep”
- ☐ Use heat or cold to manage my pain
- ☐ Others:

- Strategies I can use*

 - ☐ Exposure to morning sunlight
 - ☐ Move throughout the day
 - ☐ Pace my activity in the day
 - ☐ Limit napping
 - ☐ Dim lights and turn off electronics
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 - ☐ Others:

Mission Nutrition	What and how we eat can have a big impact on our pain.
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Mission Nutrition	What and how we eat can have a big impact on our pain.
--------------------------	---

Strategies I can use

- ☐ Create a flare-up meal plan
- ☐ Stock frozen & canned veggies
- ☐ Hydrate
- ☐ Prep my meals
- ☐ Eat mindfully using all my senses
- ☐ Ask for help with meals
- ☐ Others:

- Strategies I can use*

 - ☐ Create a flare-up meal plan
 - ☐ Stock frozen & canned veggies
 - ☐ Hydrate
 - ☐ Prep my meals
 - ☐ Eat mindfully using all my senses
 - ☐ Ask for help with meals
 - ☐ Others:



My At-Home Practice Flare-Up Action Plan

Session 6

Looking Ahead

The end of a journey is simply the start of another.

Strategies I can use

- ☐ Post my flare-up plan so I can see it
- ☐ Take tiny steps towards changes I want
- ☐ Celebrate each step
- ☐ Remember key strategies in my backpack
- ☐ Plan for getting around barriers which may come up
- ☐ Be kind to myself when there are setbacks
- ☐ Others:

The strategies in My Flare Up Action Plan that I will try FIRST are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Reflections

After trying a strategy for a reasonable time, consider:

1. What went well:
2. What do I want to change next time:
3. Other reflections:



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My At-Home Practice Flare-Up Action Plan

Additional Flare-Up Plan Resources:

[FLARE UP PLANNING \(tims.nhs.uk\)](https://tims.nhs.uk)

[Plan for Flare Ups | Action On Pain \(action-on-pain.co.uk\)](https://action-on-pain.co.uk)

[Pain Flares, Flare-up factors, Warning signs, and Management | Toronto Academic Pain Medicine Institute \(TAPMI\) \(tapmipain.ca\)](https://tapmipain.ca)

[My Flare.pdf \(tapmipain.ca\)](https://tapmipain.ca)

[Managing Chronic Pain Flare-ups: What You Can Do | Oregon Pain Guidance](#)

[Pain Management Network Flare-Up-Plan.pdf](#)



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Mindful Moments: Participant Guide

These mindful moments will be introduced throughout the 6-week group-based program. You are welcome to read through in advance or print off a copy.

We encourage you to practice these mindful moments on a daily basis and add the helpful ones to your backpack.



Mindful Moment

Mindful Breathing

Activity: Mindful Breathing

What is it? This is a simple mindful breathing activity that can help bring you to the present moment.

How do I practice this activity:

- Find a comfortable position for yourself. This might include sitting, lying down, or standing
- You can close your eyes or choose an object in your room to softly gaze at
- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth if that feels comfortable to you
- As you breathe in, bring awareness to sensations of the air as it enters your body. You might notice that the air feels cool or warm, or moist or dry
- When you exhale, notice the sensation of the air moving from your belly, and through your chest, neck, and out through your nose or mouth
- You can choose to do a few cycles of breathing in and out mindfully

Tips: Notice if your thoughts wander during this activity. If it does, know that this is common. Gently bring yourself back to the breathing activity without judgment.

Another option is to play nature sounds in the background. If you experience bothersome feelings in your body during the mindful breathing, you can shift your attention to the sounds of nature.



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With joy

This is a movement activity that you find enjoyable.

Starting with just a few minutes, move your body in a way that feels good to you. You decide how you move. All movements, even little ones to start, are helpful.

- ✓ Pain-free areas or less painful spots
- ✓ To music or to the rhythm of your breath
- ✓ By walking indoors or outside
- ✓ By dancing, hula hooping, clapping, tapping, any speed you like
- ✓ Alone or with others
- ✓ Using a YouTube video
- ✓ To your own routine

At times, when moving feels challenging, you can close your eyes and visualize that you are moving with joy. **This is your groove!**



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Mindful Moment

Finger Breath

Activity: Finger Breath

What is it? It can be difficult to communicate how we are feeling and what we are thinking when we experience intense emotions such as stress. This mindfulness activity can help ground us before having a difficult conversation or before going to a healthcare appointment.

How do I practice this activity?

Take one hand, and with the other finger coordinate your breath as you trace your thumb and fingers.

1. Let's start at the thumb: trace up the thumb as you breath in, and breath out as you trace down the thumb.
2. Go up the index finger and breath in, now breathe out as you slide down your finger.
3. Breath in as you come up the long-finger, and breath out as you go down the other side.
4. Now let's breath in and slide up the ring finger, and breath out as you go down.
5. At the pinky finger, go up breathing in, and breath out as you slide down it.

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Mindful Moment

Finger Breath



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Mindful Moments
Further Resources

Websites

[Mindfulness: What is it?](#) MyHealth.Alberta.ca

Mindfulness: Breathing Exercises [MyHealth.Alberta.ca](https://myhealth.alberta.ca)

<https://self-compassion.org/self-compassion-practices/#guided-practices> Guided self-compassion practices (free)

Books

Davis, M., Eshelman, E. R., and McKay, M. (2008). *The relaxation and stress reduction workbook*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.

Gardner-Nix, J. (2009). *The mindfulness solution to pain. Step by step techniques for chronic pain management*. New York: New Harbinger Publications.

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Note: People may find it helpful to reach out to a therapist or counsellor to support them through these practices. Please see our mental health resource list for more information.



Primary Care Alberta

Virtual Pain Program

